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AUTHOR Brown, Idalyn S.
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ABSTRACT

While extensive research has examined the personality of the alcoholic, current interest centers on the use of differential treatment for different personality types. The aim of such treatment is to focus on the disorder underlying the problem of alcoholism for each particular patient. To look for relationships among personality variables, personality measures were completed by 54 male and 17 female alcoholics in a residential treatment facility. The sample was found to be authoritarian in terms of self-esteem and masculinity positively related in both sexes. No sex differences were found for self-esteem, dominance, dependency, locus of control, repression-sensitization, authoritarianism, or masculinity. Surprisingly, on measures of masculinity-femininity, 43.3% of the males were "undifferentiated," whereas only 17.6% of the females were in this category. The findings indicate a highly authoritarian nature of both females and males in the study. (Author/JAC)

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Idalyn S. Brown

The University of Georgia

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An Investigation of Certain Personality Variables in Alcoholics

Idalyn S. Brown

Research concerning the personality of the alcoholic is extensive. Descriptions of personalities of alcoholics have come from many sources (e.g., McCord, McCord, & Gudeman, 1960; Mogar, Wilson, & Helm, 1970). However, attempts to isolate an "alcoholic personality" have been inconclusive (Goodwin, 1976; Orford, 1976). So it appears that the "alcoholic personality", per se, is no longer an issue.

Another issue relating to personalities of alcoholics is of current interest, however. This is the matter of differential treatment for different personality types. A number of researchers have advocated investigating the efficacy of various methods of treatment for different types of alcoholic patient (Goss & Morosko, 1969;1970; Horn & Wanberg, 1970; Partington & Johnson, 1969). Horn and Wanberg viewed diagnosis of the alcoholic not only as simply classifying the patient as alcoholic but also classifying as to type of alcoholic. Ritson (1971) suggested that the aim of treatment is to focus on the disorder underlying the problem of alcoholism in each particular patient. Mogar, Wilson, and Helm (1970), advocating the use of differential treatment for different personality types, suggested that operant techniques might be more beneficial as treatment for alcoholics whose drinking is a result of a character disorder, whereas other types might benefit more from group or family therapy, or talking therapies.

They suggested further that different types of alcoholics may require not only different techniques of therapy, but differential goals of treatment as well. Rohsenow and O'Leary (1978a; 1978b), noting findings that internally controlled persons are more responsive to less structured therapy while externally controlled persons are more responsive to directive therapy (e.g., Abramowitz, Abramowitz, Roback, & Jackson, 1974; Friedman & Dies, 1974) suggested that investigation of these findings with alcoholic samples would be of interest.

Until relatively recently, little research dealt specifically with the female alcoholic (e.g., Jansen & Hoffman, 1973; Mogar, Wilson & Hol[illegible]970), the assumption being, apparently, that alcoholism is the same for both sexes. The questions then arise, are there sex differences in certain personality characteristics of alcoholics? If so, do these differences have implications for differential treatment and treatment outcome for males and females? A first step toward answering these questions is to examine personality differences among alcoholics. Variables investigated in this study were chosen because of their apparent relevance for differential treatment approaches.

There are several variables that are rather consistently viewed as being characteristic of alcoholics in general. The most frequently cited include low self-esteem (e.g., Catanzzro, 1967; McCord, McCord, & Gudeman, 1960; Williams, 1965) and dependency

(e.g., Blane, 1968; Catanzaro, 1967, McCord, et al, 1960). Other variables which have received attention in the past few years include sex-role (e.g., Beckman, 1978), locus of control (Gozali & Sloan, 1971; Rohsenow & O'Leary, 1978a, 1978b), and coping strategies such as repression and sensitization (O'Leary, Donovan & Hague, 1975).

Findings vary with respect to the presence of these variables in alcoholics. Low self-esteem has been viewed, generally, as a result of excessive drinking. However, Williams (1965), in studying college problem drinkers, suggested that low self-esteem may, in fact, precede the onset of alcoholism. If this is the case, perhaps a goal of treatment might be to attack the underlying cause of poor self-esteem. Low self-esteem may be manifested somewhat differently in males and females. Blane (1968) suggested that a primary feature of the female alcoholic is a preoccupation with being inadequate, inept, and unable to change herself. This is in contrast to the primary characteristic of dependency in alcoholic males. Studies seem to support the notion of lower self-esteem in women alcoholics as compared to men (e.g., Beckman, 1978).

Blane (1968), in noting that dependency is a central theme in descriptions of alcoholics, pointed out that the term has been used in many ways to denote different things, from a hypothetical psychological cause of alcoholism, to overt behavioral manifestations. Blane viewed dependency both as an "underlying need-state and as a

directly observable behavior . . ." (p. 15), and suggested that many alcoholics do not overtly display dependent behavior. Catanzaro (1967) viewed alcoholics as being characterized by angry over-dependency. The alcoholic is aware of his excessive dependency needs and is angry because these needs seem never to be fully met by others. It appears that dependency is central to alcoholism, and that recognition of its different manifestations will be of value in planning treatment for individual alcoholics.

Locus of control (Rotter, 1966) has been described as the degree to which a person believes that he/she has control over events in his/her life. An externally oriented person believes that events in life are largely determined by external factors, while the internally oriented person views life events as being directly related to his/her own actions. Numerous studies have attempted to discover if a certain locus of control is characteristic of the alcoholic. While this research has produced conflicting findings, Rohsenow and O'Leary (1978a; 1978b) view the present trend to be toward more externality or no difference in locus of control between alcoholics and non-alcoholics. Nowicki and Hopper (1974) reported findings which indicated that female alcoholics may tend to be more external than males, and therefore differential treatment approaches for males and females might be needed.

Recent interest in the female alcoholic has produced varied hypotheses about why women drink to excess. Early theories of eti-

ology such as those of dependency (McCord, McCord, & Gudeman, 1960) and power (McClelland, Davis, Kalin, & Wanner, 1972) were assumed to apply to both sexes. Recent studies with women alcoholics tend to suggest, rather, the presence of sex-role conflicts (Jones, 1971; Parker, 1972; Wilsnak, 1976). Kinsey (1966) found that his sample of female alcoholics tended to accept the feminine role and find it gratifying. However, Fay and Brown (Note 1) found that in non-alcoholic women, masculinity is related to high self-esteem, whereas femininity appears to be unrelated to self-esteem. If this is true, then perhaps femininity in the female alcoholic is predictive of lower self-esteem.

The concepts of repression and sensitization are defined as extremes on a continuum of one's response to threatening situations or stimuli. Repressers are those individuals who tend to respond to threat with avoidance type behaviors (e.g., denial, repression) while sensitizers tend to react with approach type responses (e.g., intellectualization). Since it is assumed that persons will be consistent in their defensive styles, such individual styles may have implications for treatment of various maladaptive behaviors, including excessive drinking. Repression and sensitization have been related to locus of control (Tolor & Reznikoff, 1967; O'Leary, Donovan & Hague, 1975). Repressers may tend to be internals, while sensitizers may tend toward externality.

It appears that authoritarianism has not been widely studied in alcoholics. Authoritarian persons are said to be characterized by rigidity, intolerance, suspicion, conventionality and anger (Aronson, 1972). The similarity between the backgrounds of authoritarian persons and alcoholics suggests a relationship between alcoholism and authoritarianism.

It is apparent that the association of the above variables with alcoholism, particularly in females, remains unclear. This study, which was exploratory in nature, was an attempt to look for relationships among personality variables in an alcoholic sample. It was hypothesized that alcoholics would tend to be authoritarian in outlook. Also, it was predicted that a negative relationship would exist between femininity and self-esteem for both males and females.

Subjects

Subjects were 54 male and 17 female alcoholics in treatment in a residential facility for chronic alcoholics. This group was part of a larger sample of 256 residents who were also tested. Residents came from varied educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Ages ranged from 23 to 66 years with a mean age of 42.1 years.

Procedure

All participants completed the MMPI as part of the routine admissions battery. The Revised Repression-Sensitization Scale (R-S) (Byrne, Barry, & Nelson, 1963), Dominance (D)) (Gough, McClosky & Meehl, 1951), Dependency (DY) (Navran, 1954) and Ego-

strength (ES) (Barron, 1953) Scales were scored from the MMPI. Other measures, i.e., the Balanced F Scale (Byrne, 1974), Internal External Scale (I-E) (Rotter, 1966) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974) were administered by the investigator in group sessions. Participants agreed to complete a follow-up questionnaire six weeks after discharge from the treatment center. Only persons who returned this questionnaire are included in the present sample.

Results and Discussion

Multivariate analysis of variance showed no difference between the sexes on any variable with the exception of the femininity and masculinity-femininity components of the PAQ. Females scored significantly higher on femininity and males higher on masculinity-femininity. Comparison of the sample means with means reported by Mitchell and Byrne (1973) indicated that this sample was significantly authoritarian, supporting the first hypothesis. Self-esteem, as measured by the ES scale was unrelated to femininity, so that the expected negative relationship between self-esteem and femininity was not found, but self-esteem was positively and significantly related to masculinity for both sexes, lending partial support to the second hypothesis (Table 1). As expected, the sample was found to be dependent and low in self-esteem. Findings for the I-E and R-S were ambiguous, with mean scores falling in an intermediate range, with a trend toward internality. Most surprising was the finding that

43.3 percent of the males were "undifferentiated" in sex-role compared to 17.6 percent of females (Table 2). This was determined using the Spence-Helmreich (1978) median split scoring method for the PAQ.

Table 3 shows correlations between the personality measures (DO, DY, ES, R-S, I-E, Balanced F and PAQ) for the combined (males and females) sample. As expected, there was a significant negative correlation between dominance and dependency. Negative correlations also occurred between dominance and the R-S and I-E scales, indicating that more dominant individuals in this sample tend to be repressers, as well as internally oriented. Significant negative correlations occurring between dependency and ego strength, masculinity, and M-F components of the PAQ indicate that more dependent persons in this sample tend to be low in self-esteem and in the masculine qualities measured by the PAQ subscales. Significant negative relationships between ego strength and R-S, and I-E indicate that low self-esteem is associated with external orientation and sensitization. Repression-sensitization also related negatively to masculinity and M-F, indicating that sensitizers lack the more masculine personality characteristics. Femininity and M-F were also negatively correlated.

Significant positive correlations were found among dominance, ego-strength and masculinity. Dependency related positively to R-S, indicating that sensitizers tend to be dependent, while ego strength

appeared related to masculinity as shown by positive correlations with M and M-F. Internality appeared to be positively associated with repression, while masculinity was found to relate positively to M-F. Unexpected was the finding that masculinity correlated positively with femininity. However, Spence and Helmreich (1978) also report low positive relationships between these two variables.

Conclusions and Implications

The most notable finding of this study was the highly authoritarian orientation of both males and females. If this is true of alcoholics in general it would have definite implications for treatment, both from the standpoint of modality as well as therapist-client interaction. Failure to find any definitive trend in coping style or control orientation may indicate that these dimensions vary in alcoholics and specific orientations may not, therefore, be characteristic of alcoholics in general. Findings serve to confirm descriptions of alcoholics as dependent and lacking in self-esteem.

The similarity between males and females on most of the variables measured tend to support the notion that alcoholism is the same in both sexes, but such a conclusion may be questioned in light of the findings with regard to categorization of undifferentiated persons. While not significant, the percentages are interesting, tending to suggest that the area of sex-role may disclose differences between males and females that could have implications for treatment.

While the small size of the sample dictates caution in drawing firm conclusions, further research seems worthwhile. The next step of this investigation will involve the analysis of similar data collected from persons who failed to return follow-up questionnaires to determine if differences exist between these two groups. If so, this may have implications for program evaluation based on returned responses. It might be that the most valuable information in terms of evaluation of treatment never comes back to the evaluator. Should subsequent research produce similar findings with respect to personality variables in different samples, then investigation of long-range outcomes of treatment in relation to these variables would be in order.

This report represents a portion of research done by the author in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree, and was carried out under the supervision of Gary W. Hanson, Ph.D., Francis Marion College.

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Table 1

Correlations of ES with the PAQ

Correlation Coefficients for Males

Scales	ES	M	F	M-F
ES	1.00			
M	.46***	1.00		
F	.22	.42**	1.00	
M-F	.18	.29*	-.19	1.00

N = 70

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

Correlation Coefficients for Females

Scales	ES	M	F	M-F
ES	1.00			
M	.66***	1.00		
F	-0.16	.41	1.00	
M-F	.66***	.41	-.52*	1.00

N = 70

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .005

Table 2

Classifications According to the Spence-Helmreich Scheme

Femininity	Masculinity: Above Median		Masculinity: Below Median	
Above Median	Androgynous		Feminine	
	Males	26.4%	Males	17.1%
	Females	29.4%	Females	41.2%
Below Median	Masculine		Undifferentiated	
	Males	13.2%	Males	43.3%
	Females	11.8%	Females	17.6%

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients Among Personality Variables

Scales	DO	DY	ES	R-S	I-E	BAL F	M	F	M-F
DO	1.0								
DY	- .63***	1.0							
ES	.64***	-.80***	1.0						
R-S	- .67***	.35***	-.82***	1.0					
I-E	- .31**	.19	-.41***	.32**	1.0				
BAL F	-0.17	-.06	.07	-.18	- .06	1.0			
M	.50**	-.52***	.53***	-.50***	- .28	.04	1.0		
F	.13	-.06	.06	-.20	- .19	-.10	.35**	1.0	
M-F	.23	-.35**	.33**	-.29*	- .04	.02	.35**	-.37**	1.0

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001